

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION

6 March 1987

David Brownlee, Chairman

The twenty-sixth meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation began at 1:00 p.m. on Friday 6 March 1987 in the offices of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, 1313 City Hall Annex.

Present: David Brownlee, Chairman of the Committee on Historic Designation
David Baldinger, Deputy Director, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Caroline Golab
Janet Klein

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Carmen Weber, Archaeologist, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Mary Lou McFarland - Executive Director, Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia

Lenore Millhollen, President, Center City Residents Association
William J. D. Jordan, Center City Residents Association

NEW BUSINESS

The Committee reviewed nominations of the following historical and architectural resources.

Raymond Pace Alexander/Cecil B. Moore House
1708 Jefferson Street

c. 1885

The brick and brownstone rowhouse at 1708 Jefferson Street possesses significance as the home of both Raymond Pace Alexander and Cecil B. Moore who rank as two of the most important leaders of the Black civil rights movement in twentieth century Philadelphia.

Alexander deserves recognition as Philadelphia's first Black city councilman, the first Black to sit on the Court of Common Pleas and most importantly for his lifetime struggle to better the lot of Blacks. Responding to the segregation of Blacks in restaurants, movie theatres and other public accommodations, Mr. Alexander instigated and won law suits which broke down many of these barriers. Councilman Alexander is most famous for bringing suit against Girard College which resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Girard College, under public trusteeship, could not continue to discriminate against Blacks in its admission policies. As the author of the 1951 "Report on the Integration of Negro Soldiers in America's Army of Occupation," Alexander facilitated the integration of United States Army units.

Cecil B. Moore achieved eminence as a Black civil rights leader, a brilliant criminal lawyer, an influential city councilman and president of the Philadelphia chapter of the NAACP. Embodying the more militant style of the 1960s and 70s, Moore recognized the value of direct civil rights action through picketing and protest. In 1963, as the new president of the Philadelphia NAACP, Moore organized a picket line around a building construction site which cut off the flow of building materials and forced organized labor to hire Black construction workers. A similar picket of the Trailways bus terminal forced that company to hire its first 275 Black bus drivers. In 1965, eight years after the initiative to desegregate Girard College was defeated through the appointing of private trustees, Cecil Moore organized the longest unceasing civil rights demonstration of the turbulent 1960s. This protest motivated the final round of court battles which resulted in the actual desegregation of the College. As a city councilman, Moore spent the last years of his life pressing for opportunities for Blacks in housing and employment.

The house at 1708 Jefferson Street served as home base for both Alexander and Moore during the most significant times in their careers. It is fitting that these two men who used different methods to fight for the same rights should be memorialized in one house.

The Committee asked that the nomination be revised to document more fully that these two men lived in the house during the most significant times in their careers and that the report in general be documented more fully with books and articles rather than newspapers. The nomination is to be shown to various members of the committee after revision.

The committee recommended the designation of 1708 Jefferson Street by a vote of 4-0.

The DeBenneville Family Burial Ground possesses significance as the burial place of British General James Tanner Agnew and the Reverend George DeBenneville, and as one of Philadelphia's rare surviving private family cemeteries. General Agnew is one of only four British generals from the Colonial and Revolutionary war periods buried on American soil. He led one of Britain's seven army brigades during the campaigns at Danbury, New York, White Plains, Fort Washington, Brandywine and Germantown. He was killed by American musket fire during the Battle of Germantown and buried along with Lieutenant Colonel John Bird in Germantown's Lower Burying Ground. General Sir William Howe, fearing the desecration of the graves, quickly approached the DeBennevilles and successfully secured the right to reinter the bodies secretly in their family burial ground for protection. In 1903, the graves were marked with a stone by "request of His Majesty's Government". Dr. George De Benneville, the first preacher of the Universalist faith in America, is himself buried in this burial ground and adds significance to the site. George De Benneville, the son of Huguenot parents "conceived the doctrine of universal restitution" meaning that everyone, not just pre-chosen individuals, would be saved. Although Universalism as an institution in America was established by the Reverend John Murray in 1770, De Benneville by preaching the faith in Pennsylvania in the 1750's is revered by Universalists for his early and important work in establishing the faith. Lastly the graveyard possesses significance as a rare, perhaps unique surviving 18th century private family burial ground in the City of Philadelphia.

The committee recommended the designation of the burial ground by a vote of 4-0.

C.C. Knight/Middishade Factory
350-352 N. 16th Street

Watson and Huckel, architects

1908

This six-story brick, Classical Revival factory building possesses significance as the home of the Middishade Clothing Factory, and is a prime building representing the apparel industry in Philadelphia. The building was erected in 1908 for C. C. Knight, a company that made tools for the nearby Baldwin factory. The Middishade Company which bought the building several years later specialized in making blue serge suits, the standard suit of the American businessman in the early 20th Century. Middishade as the largest producer of that garment in the country was an important component of the Philadelphia apparel industry. This segment of Philadelphia industry was for many years the largest employer in the city and second in output only to New York. The building also possesses significance as one of only two industrial buildings left along the important industrial corridor just north of Center City and west of Broad Street along the railroad tracks.

The committee recommended the designation of this building by a vote of 4-0.

The committee also recommended supporting efforts by PHPC or other groups to survey industrial buildings in the city to get a sense of which are the most significant and intact industrial resources. This will make future designations of industrial buildings easier to judge, as well as help to protect the most important buildings of a quickly disappearing type.

Snellenburg Clothing Factory
642 North Broad Street

William Steele, architects

1903

The Snellenburg Clothing Factory possesses significance as the production center for the prominent drygoods firm of Nathan Snellenburg and Sons, as the work of one of the principal industrial architects of Philadelphia, the William Steele Company, and as a fine example of Victorian Romanesque Revival architecture. The Snellenburgs began their retailing business during the years after the Civil War and built the first of the enormous department store buildings on Market Street. The Snellenburg factory exemplifies the pattern of the great retailing establishment such as Snellenburg's Strawbridge's and Wanamaker's actually producing their own clothing items. This factory which employed women almost exclusively, represents a category of manufacturing that dominated industrial employment in the City of Philadelphia. It also represents an important aspect of Jewish history, as Jews were largely responsible for founding the ready made clothing industry in America. The well known architects William Steele and Sons combined expertise in engineering and design to create a building that was exceptionally fire safe, well lit and ventilated. The nomination states "with the contemporary Ballinger Company, Steele helped to establish the modern industrial plant." Lastly the building is a fine example of its style with its Northern Italian Romanesque, central tower arched windows, brick corbell table and polychromed stone voussoirs above the windows. The Snellenburg Company made use of this ornamental facade to present a distinguished image to Philadelphians and indeed the building continues to be a visual landmark on North Broad Street.

The committee recommended the designation of 642-58 North Broad Street by a vote of 4-0.

WFIL Television Studio
4548 Market Street

Savery, Sheetz and Gilmour
Abraham Levy

1947-1948
1952

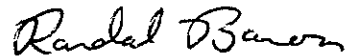
The nomination report for the WFIL Television Studio claims that the building possesses significance as one of the first buildings in the United States designed specifically for television broadcasting and as the site of the early years of American Bandstand, a major force in the development and dispersal of rock and roll music and television's longest running musical variety program. The original structure which shows elements of moderne design was published as a model for television station design in the late 1940s and early 1950s in the Architectural Record and TV Stations: A Guide for Architects, Engineers and Management. In 1947, when WFIL began broadcasting, it was one of only a handful of stations operating in the United States and possibly the first nationally to occupy a building specifically designed for television broadcasting. Walter Annenberg, who built a media empire based on the Philadelphia Inquirer and WFIL, built this studio next to the Philadelphia Arena to concentrate on sports broadcasting. WFIL expanded the original building in 1952 and began a local record and dance program called Bandstand in the newly completed Studio B. The show became so popular that in 1957, the year after Dick Clark became the host, the show joined the national ABC network as American Bandstand. The nomination form claims that the show had an "immediate overwhelming and sustained impact on the future of rock and roll music and on the popular culture of the baby boom generation". The building is associated with "the program during its early and most influential years 1952-1963".

The committee asked to tour the interior of the building before making a recommendation to the commission.

The Committee on Historic Designation toured an area tentatively called Rittenhouse Historic District on 27 February 1987 and discussed the potential district at the Designation Committee Meeting on 6 March 1987. The Committee focused its discussion on the issue of boundaries and on the definition of the terms "Significant", "Contributing" and "Intrusion" used to rate the structures in a district. The Committee agreed to take a second tour of the district on 27 March 1987 to look at the western and northern boundaries and to vote on a recommendation to the Commission at the Designation Meeting of 3 April 1987.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Randal Baron".

Randal Baron
Preservation Planner

RB:sj

